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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE SITUATION WITH REGARD TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES

VERBATIM RECORD OF THE 1372nd MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 15 August 1990, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. TADESSE (Ethiopia)

CONTENTS

Special Committee decision of 17 August 1989 concerning Puerto Rico (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

SPECIAL COMMITTEE DECISION OF 17 AUGUST 1989 CONCERNING PUERTO RICO (A/AC.109/L.1746) (continued)

The CHAIRMAN: Before resuming the hearings on the item, I wish to draw members' attention to draft resolution A/AC.109/L.1747 on the item.

With respect to the hearings, members have before them addendum 2 to aide-mémoire 28/90 containing an additional request for hearing. May I take it that the Committee agrees to accede to the request of the organization concerned to be heard by the Committee?

It was so decided.

The CHAIRMAN: Before calling on the first speaker on today's list of speakers, I wish once again to urge petitioners to be very brief and to keep their statement delivery within the limits of five to six minutes and pertinent to the issue under consideration. The large number of petitioners still on our list makes that measure absolutely indispensable.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Alexis Massol González (Taller de Arte y Cultura de Adjuntas and Centro Cultural de Adjuntas) took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN: I call on Mr. Massol González.

Mr. MASSOL GONZALEZ (interpretation from Spanish): My name is Alexis Andrés Massol Gonzáles. I represent the Taller de Arte y Cultura de Adjuntas and the Centro Cultural de Adjuntas, Puerto Rico. My statement includes a manifesto endorsed by more than 50 of the country's cultural centres, whose officials are elected by the citizens of each town. They represent a fundamental part of the will and aspirations of the Puerto Rican people. Those cultural centres serve a population of 1,800,000 Puerto Ricans.

(Mr. Massol González)

Wishing to be brief, I must say that when the United States invaded Puerto Rico in 1898, the island was already a nation, with its own common territory, its own language, literature, customs, history, traditions and music - in short a people with its own particular soul. To give an idea of this fact, it may be noted that the Convent of the Dominicans at San Juan, Puerto Rico, was teaching 100 years before Harvard University came into being.

With the interruption in 1898 of Puerto Rico's development as a nation, a painful process of colonization and Americanization began. The United States took over the Government militarily, took over the economy, eliminated the Spanish language and made English the official language, took away our Puerto Rican citizenship and made us United States citizens.

(Mr. Massol González)

It has attempted, by means of United States customs, traditions, songs and heroes, to make Puerto Ricans talk, think and act like Americans. Ninety-two painful years of cultural aggression have gone by. They have tried to take away our people's language, its life and its soul. Only after 54 years did they allow the local Government officially to sing its national anthem and raise the Puerto Rican flag.

Today we can say that there have been many attempts to gain sovereign power in order to make our own decisions. All have been blocked by the wall of Northern power. Self-government efforts have been broken and humiliated. Liberation efforts have met with repression, prison and death to such a point that today there are 18 Puerto Ricans in United States prisons for political reasons, 14 of them already imprisoned for more than 10 years, and 11 others await trial. That sums up one aspect of our history.

But this interruption of our growing nationhood process has been met with an answer which over 92 years has brought our new and creative patriotic forces into play. The people and its artists have accepted a mandate to work towards national salvation: to produce a Puerto Rican culture, to create Puerto Rican values, to uphold the ideals of nationhood, so that there will be a single path, a single destiny.

Every day, in every public square in Puerto Rico, on every beach, in every city, in every neighbourhood, at every festival, in every theatre, in poetry, in street performances, in handicrafts, in books and in song - in all the manifestations of a people, today in 1990 there is but a single decision in the light of Pedro Albizu Campos' definition of the choice before us, "Yankees or Puerto Ricans". There is no doubt on that score: 98 per cent of the Puerto Rican people is deciding daily that its language, its culture and its soul must follow its determined fate. We must be Puerto Ricans, Caribbeans and Latin Americans.

(Mr. Massol González)

A year and a half ago, the United States Government initiated a bill concerning a referendum in Puerto Rico. Congress will draft and adopt the bill and thus will always retain the power to decide the fate of our people. So far, the Congress of the United States has dealt with the question of status as though Puerto Rico were a territory inhabited by individuals, not by a people with its own national life. It is treating the fate of our nation as though it were trading on Wall Street.

Throughout the process, the question of culture, language and the fate of the Puerto Rican soul has been ignored. For example, most cultural organizations were denied participation in public hearings, and the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña was granted a mere three minutes in which to address this complex matter. Moreover, when annexationists requested that English and Spanish should be included as official languages in the referendum legislation, Senator Johnston replied that it would be impossible because the proposal would never be accepted in Congress.

In that way the workers and defenders of Puerto Rican culture have been denied the right to state clearly that annexation is incompatible with and contrary to our culture and our language and the historic destiny of Puerto Rico. It would be the death of our nationhood.

There is no doubt that under statehood Puerto Rican culture would become mere folklore, as is the case in Hawaii. Puerto Ricans would then live in a vast ghetto surrounded by military-industrial parks, as described in the 2020 Plan. Ghetto and "minority" status: that would be our fate, as it is the fate of our 2.5 million Puerto Rican brethren who live in the United States, experiencing statehood every day. Among the communities residing in the United States, the Puerto Rican community has the highest levels of poverty, unemployment and school dropouts.

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(Mr. Massol González)

They suffer from the rules and values imposed by a United States society marked by racism, discrimination and the supremacy of the white and the wealthy.

Therein lies the problem for the Puerto Rican people. It must choose either seeming material survival or nationhood as its only future. We are about to repeat 1898, but from a different angle: using economic conditioning and dependency along with the supposedly democratic practice of a referendum. This time there is the possibility of assimilation and of the irreversible destruction of our language and our Puerto Rican culture.

The Taller de Arte y Cultura de Adjuntas and the country's cultural centres which have signed the petition I am submitting represent more than 50 cities in Puerto Rico. Annually they undertake more than 100 special cultural and handicraft activities involving over 800,000 people, with the participation of more than 5,000 artists and some 1,700 artisans. Together, we emphasize the following points:

Culture and language have been ignored in the official discussion of the referendum.

The plans for the referendum in their present form run counter to the true self-determination of the people of Puerto Rico.

The present referendum is not an appropriate instrument for resolving the question of Puerto Rico's colonial status.

If the self-determination of the Puerto Rican people is to be valid, it must conform to the criteria and norms of international law.

Puerto Rico is a country which throughout its history has stood in solidarity with the various liberation and humanitarian struggles in the Americas. On 26 October 1990 we shall celebrate the bicentenary of Antonio Valero de Bernabe, a son of Borinquen who is among the liberators of Mexico and Peru, the heroes of old Colombia and the founders of the Republic of Venezuela. He was Simon Bolivar's

(Mr. Massol González)

lieutenant. Today we raise high his sword and call upon the Special Committee to do its best to intervene in this situation, which is an offence against and a corruption of international law and democracy.

I have appended to my written text copies of two petitions, with their signatures.

Mr. Massol González withdrew.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Eligio Gonzalez Castro (The Liberty Council and the Movimiento Albizuista Nacionalista) took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN: I call on Mr. Gonzalez Castro.

Mr. GONZALEZ CASTRO: My name is Eligio Gonzalez Castro and I am a Puerto Rican national from Lares, Puerto Rico. I am addressing this Committee in the name of The Liberty Council, a New York City-based lobbying organization.

Every year, Puerto Rican patriots and freedom fighters have addressed this Committee, seeking the votes of its members. The result of the votes cast by the members of this international body has reflected with predictable precision the scope and extent of the control exerted over members' nations by the United States.

To the outside observer, the results of past voting by this Committee on the question of the independence of Puerto Rico make it appear that the white Anglo-Saxon Europeanized representatives, such as those of Australia and New Zealand, favour the United States, while third world members flit back and forth between abstention and votes in favour of the national liberation of Puerto Rico.

(Mr. Gonzalez Castro)

We, the Puerto Rican people, know perhaps better than anyone else what the designs of the beast are. The United States has refused to pay its contribution to the United Nations. Occasionally it sends a small payment with conditions attached, seeking to demand control in exchange for its monetary contributions. If the United States does this to the entire United Nations, it follows it will do far worse to the individual member nations of this Committee. It is for this reason that the members of the Liberty Council, which I represent today, as well as all Puerto Ricans who believe in freedom, recognize that each individual vote cast by each of the nations that form this Committee in favour of Puerto Rico is cast at a great sacrifice to the member concerned. As for those that abstain, we realize that the pressures by the beast must be unbearable. And, lastly, the representatives of the United States or its subservient ally, if there is one, who may choose to vote against Puerto Rico - even they must realize they are not doing the right thing.

Which brings me to a point of information. The African nations represented here today - Sierra Leone, Mali, Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, Congo, Tanzania, Tunisia - have more intensely and more recently than others tasted the gravest injustice that can be brought to bear upon humanity. They have endured the atrocities and pain of colonialism. Less than a decade ago, their European masters, France and England, had the leadership roles and took the entire continent of Africa and divided it among themselves to own, to control, to dispose of at will, treating the people like cattle - actually selling human beings. Fresh out of that environment grew the creation of this international forum which we call the United Nations.

When the United Nations was created, please remember where it started. It did not start in Addis Ababa, Nairobi or Tripoli. It started in London, England. These creators of the United Nations established for themselves a security blanket in a fashion reminiscent of colonial Africa. They call it, as we all know too

(Mr. Gonzalez Castro)

well, the United Nations Security Council. Now, faced with monopolizers like the United States, there is talk of taking the power away from the Security Council. It is my hope that once this last vestige of colonialism is eliminated the world will begin to be free.

By itself, the thought of a United Nations free of the colonialist principle, which is the Security Council, sounds invigorating. Well, gentlemen, invigorate yourselves. Set your eyes on the future. Ignore the beast. Act in consonance with your principles. Vote for freedom. Vote for Puerto Rico.

This year the United States is officially involved in a plot to annex the Puerto Rican nation to the territory of the United States once and for all. This annexation plot, better known as Senate Bill 712, the plebiscite, and its accompanying amendment by Representative José Serrano, is designed to remove all vestiges of national sovereignty from the Puerto Rican people by eliminating the element of inalienability from the internationally recognized right of national sovereignty.

The Liberty Council, in the name of all Puerto Rican patriots everywhere, has already put the Congress of the United States on notice that we will not and do not accept the validity of the plebiscite, even if Spanish is guaranteed. We will not vote. We reserve our right to national sovereignty.

National sovereignty resides in the heart of every man, woman and child, irrespective of their birthplace. We recognize that the birthplace of a displaced ethnic group does not erase its nationality, as nationality runs with blood: it is not a matter of choice.

Speaking of choice, a right to which the ultra-liberals of the United States attach so much meaning, a human choice, to be recognizable, must conform to decency and to reason. Theoretically, all choices are available to a free woman, to a free man, to a free child - no, no, not a child; he cannot be absolutely free. Can

(Mr. Gonzalez Castro)

anyone be absolutely free? Certainly not, for if we were our mind could deteriorate to the point of believing that death is a viable choice, that the death of a nation by annexation is a reasonable choice. To die is not a choice.

National sovereignty is an inalienable right. It is beyond vote, it is beyond surrender. For, even as the confused and neutralized anti-patriotic forces of my land - be they commonwealthers or annexationists - surrender our nation to the empire, the right to liberty survives. Every nation in the world has a right to freedom.

In the name of all Puerto Ricans, including children who will not vote in the annexation plebiscite plot, I urge this Committee to request an extraordinary hearing by the United Nations to prevent the annexation of Puerto in 1991. The United States Congress, counting on the statehood vote of the American nationals, Cuban expatriates and other non-Puerto Ricans who live in Puerto Rico and occupy the jobs and places of patriots who have been displaced to the empire, and counting also on the self-implementing statehood clause in their plebiscite, plans to annex Puerto Rico to the United States, notwithstanding the fact that over 50 per cent of all Puerto Rican nationals in and outside Puerto Rico object to such annexation. Such an act is in violation of international and moral law and therefore falls within the jurisdiction of the United Nations. We urge the United Nations to be ready to send United Nations peace forces into Puerto Rico after the plebiscite to wrest control of our nation from the United States and prevent an intifadah of greater proportions than that waged against the Israeli dogs by the courageous people of Palestine, as we now face the possibility of becoming the Palestinians of the Caribbean, foreigners in our own land.

The second half of this statement will be delivered in Spanish; it is made in representation of the Movimiento Albizuista Nacionalista.

(Mr. Gonzalez Castro)

(spoke in Spanish)

I wish to thank you for this opportunity to speak out in defence of Puerto Rico. Under the anti-Puerto Rican conditions that prevail today in our homeland of Puerto Rico - within Puerto Rico or in economic exile that has been imposed upon us - the voices of patriotic Puerto Ricans do not enjoy the privilege of being heard. We thank you for this opportunity.

The world is at war. Countries that have always supported Puerto Rican independence are engaged in intense conflict with respect to their interests. The powers of the world, like bloodthirsty vultures, have fallen upon Kuwait and have seized Kuwaiti investments within their own countries. Japan, to mention one of these vultures, has frozen some $20 billion invested by Kuwait in Japan. Moreover the United States has proposed to the Security Council the imposition of an international boycott against Iraq and Kuwait. The Soviet Union having been eliminated as an offsetting element, the leading vulture now has free rein to control the entire world. Its theory of manifest destiny has been revived.

(Mr. Gonzalez Castro)

Bear in mind the new face of that monster when you come to vote on the issue of Puerto Rico. In previous years, the issue of the positive self-determination of the people of Puerto Rico was discussed in this forum while the United States was apparently not participating. However, behind the scenes, through the voices of members of the Committee that it was able to threaten, buy or bribe, the United States was presenting its intransigent position that Puerto Rico is a domestic issue not within the international jurisdiction of this forum.

Now the United States is an active participant in a matter concerning the national sovereignty of Puerto Rico. In the text of Senate Bill 712, commonly known as the referendum, the Congress of the United States has clearly and evidently recognized that Puerto Rico has the right to independence. Thus, it has refuted its own former theory that this is a domestic problem in which the United Nations should not meddle. Under the international law that must prevail in this forum, that admission by the Congress of the United States is an official recognition of Puerto Rico's right to national sovereignty and independence.

It is clear - and even those of us who deny it are aware - that that recognition, the inclusion of independence as one of the alternatives in the referendum, is a legal artifice, since it is only by including independence as one of the alternatives that one can create the impression of the legitimacy of the referendum.

I shall not dwell upon all of the reasons why the referendum is merely a trick to annex Puerto Rico, definitively and irreversibly to the territory of the United States. I am sure that other speakers will clarify that point. The meaningful aspect of the referendum phenomenon that the Committee must consider is that the United States and the source of power in the United States - the Congress - in

(Mr. Gonzalez Castro)

their eagerness to deprive Puerto Rico of its national sovereignty, had to recognize the Puerto Rican right to independence.

For that reason, it is incumbent upon this forum to call upon the United States Department of State to express a position that is consonant with the right to independence of the countries of the world, and therefore it is incumbent upon this forum to take the case of Puerto Rico direct to the General Assembly.

National sovereignty is inalienable. It cannot be surrendered, voluntarily or involuntarily. It cannot be handed over, either by vote or by any other means. Patriotic Puerto Ricans will not participate in the referendum. We will not vote. If perchance it turns out that there are votes in favour of independence in the referendum planned for June 1991, they will be the votes of Americans and foreigners who are living in Puerto Rico and who feel solidarity with independence but are unaware of the inalienable nature of national sovereignty. No true Puerto Rican would allow himself to participate in the deceitful surrender of his homeland. By refusing to participate, we Puerto Rican patriots uphold the inalienability of our sovereignty. A single Puerto Rican woman who calls for independence is worth more than all of those who deny, offend or compromise it. Long live free and nationalist Puerto Rico.

The CHAIRMAN: I must point out here that the Committee is composed of member countries that are sovereign and act on the basis of their considered judgement. Therefore, while information from petitioners on the item is appreciated, remarks that impinge upon the sovereign rights of member countries should be avoided, as they in no way help the process.

I also wish to remind other petitioners once again to confine themselves to the issue under consideration.

Mr. Gonzalez Castro withdrew.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Linda Backiel, Center for Constitutional Rights, took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN: I call on Ms. Backiel.

Ms. BACKIEL (Center for Constitutional Rights): I am speaking this morning on behalf of both the Center for Constitutional Rights and the Instituto Puertorriqueño para Derechos Civiles, two legal organizations dedicated to the primacy of human rights and international law as the best guarantors of world peace. Both provide legal representation to victims of political repression practised against Puerto Ricans who assert their national identity and demand that Puerto Rico should take its rightful place in the community of free and independent nations.

Colonialism is intolerable under international law. The Puerto Rican people must be afforded a free and fair opportunity to exercise its right to self-determination. That is not available under the referendum currently being proposed for 1991. The plebiscite originates not with the Puerto Rican people but in the United States. Not only was it publicly announced by President Bush, but he has also actively supported the option of annexation of Puerto Rico as a state of the United States.

The Congress of the United States continues to determine all the rights of the Puerto Rican people and the status of the island with respect to the United States. Such a stranglehold over the island's people, its rights and its destiny, is visible even within the process of formulating the referendum to determine that people's future.

The referendum currently contemplated allows the United States Congress to set all paramaters for the referendum and gives the final say on the island's status, regardless of the choice of the Puerto Rican people, to the United States Congress and Supreme Court. A referendum in which the United States Congress decides when

(Ms. Backiel)

it will occur, if it will occur, who can participate, at what pace discussions about a referendum will be held, and whether or not the decision of the Puerto Rican people will be acceptable directly contravenes General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), which recognizes the right of all peoples to self-determination.

The Charter of the United Nations recognizes the right of peoples to self-determination in accordance with the principle, contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government. In violation of that principle, the United States Congress granted three political parties total control over the debate and formulation of the status options, to the exclusion of the Puerto Rican people itself, as if the right to self-determination were a right of the political parties and not a right of the people of Puerto Rico.

Colonialism has forced over 40 per cent of the people of Puerto Rico to migrate, at least temporarily, to the United States. As a people divided by colonialism, Puerto Ricans in the United States share a stake in the island's destiny and are entitled to participate in the referendum. The United States Congress has refused to include that participation.

One significiant result of United States control over the referendum is the refusal to recognize the importance of the maintenance of the Spanish language and Puerto Rican culture. The use of Spanish as an official language to preserve and enhance Puerto Rico's rich Hispanic culture was rejected by the United States Senate committee under the statehood proposal for Puerto Rico. The United States rejection of Puerto Rico's cultural reality in the formulation of the plebiscite violates Article 73 a of the Charter of the United Nations, which mandates "due respect for the culture of the peoples concerned". It also usurps internationally recognized principles that protect the rights of peoples to freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

(Ms. Backiel)

The proposed plebiscite fails to respect the universally accepted principle of the right to self-determination of peoples. Thus it lacks all legitimacy under international law. In the end, it will fail to resolve the question of the status of Puerto Rico and will serve only to deceive the world community.

The Centre for Constitutional Rights and the Institute for Civil Rights of Puerto Rico urge this Committee to remain vigilant on the issue of Puerto Rico's colonial status and to support the right of the Puerto Rican people to self-determination. We request that this Committee reaffirm Puerto Rico's right to self-determination under United Nations resolution 1514 (XV); that it require the transfer of power to the people of Puerto Rico prior to the conduct of any plebiscite; that it require, for the validity of any plebiscite, the participation of all the Puerto Rican people; that it require an end to United States interference and political repression and an amnesty for Puerto Rican political prisoners and prisoners of war.

The United States must be held accountable under principles of international law if the people of Puerto Rico are ever truly to exercise their right to self-determination, free from political repression and free from intrusion, in an informed and democratic process.

Ms. Backiel withdrew.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Carlos Quirós Méndez (Comité Timón Pro-Frente Socialista Contra el Plebiscito) took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN: I now call on Mr. Quirós Méndez.

Mr. QUIROS MENDEZ (interpretation from Spanish): My name is Carlos Quirós Méndez and I am here on behalf of the Comité Timón Pro-Frente Socialista Contra el Plebiscito. I am accompanied by compañeros Josefina Rodriguez and Federico Fernandez, who are also members of our Committee.

(Mr. Quirós Méndez)

The Steering Committee for a Socialist Front against the Plebiscite is a recently created unitary structure which includes 10 organizations and various non-affiliated individuals committed to the national liberation of Puerto Rico and to the construction of a society of peace and social justice.

Today we come to this forum to alert the international community to the fact that the United States Government is trampling on the inalienable right of the Puerto Rican people to self-determination and independence.

Since the beginning of 1989 the United States Government has been promoting a referendum in Puerto Rico in which the residents of the island will supposedly express their preference regarding their political status. The Steering Committee for a Socialist Front against the Plebiscite believes that this referendum, to be held in June or July 1991, is nothing but a farce designed to legitimize colonialism in Puerto Rico. Our reasons for that belief are as follows:

First, the referendum on political status promoted by the United States Government is a farce and a fraud against the international community because it does not meet the minimum requirements established by United Nations General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV). It is paradoxical that while the United States Government recognizes that Puerto Rico's sovereignty lies in the United States Congress, it refuses to recognize the colonial status of our island. For that reason it has rejected any United Nations participation in the process of discussion about our status, or any United Nations supervision of the proposed referendum.

Secondly, the referendum process has been completely anti-democratic. It has been controlled in all aspects by officials of the United States Government and by the interests of that country's big capitalists. The rules of the game have been imposed by the rulers of the United States, and the United States Congress has the

(Mr. Quirós Méndez)

final say over the content of the referendum which will ultimately be presented to the people of Puerto Rico. Only a few Puerto Ricans have been allowed to comment and to make suggestions.

To demonstrate the anti-democratic character of the referendum, we shall offer only three examples.

The first example is the total control the United States Congress has over the definitions and content of each of the status formulas which will be voted upon in the referendum. These definitions are not the product of the will of the Puerto Rican people but have been conveniently and deliberately imposed by the United States Government. It is important to point out that none of the definitions imposed by the United States Government meets the minimum requirements of international law on decolonization, specifically those included in resolution 1541 (XV) of the United Nations General Assembly.

The second example is the absolute control the United States Government will have over the voting process during the referendum. This proves without any doubt that the proposed plebiscite is a farce, since the entire voting process will be directly supervised by the United States Attorney General's office - the same agency in charge of the persecution and repression of the island's independence movement - and by a special court composed of three United States judges, who belong to the same judicial system that is responsible for the incarceration of many Puerto Rican advocates of independence. This is a blatant mockery of what is supposed to be an exercise in self-determination by the Puerto Rican people and constitutes an affront to the decolonization procedures established by the United Nations.

The third example is that while more than 2 million Puerto Ricans residing in the United States will be denied participation, hundreds of thousands of foreigners

(Mr. Quirós Méndez)

who are residents of Puerto Rico will be allowed to participate, which could affect the outcome of the referendum one way or the other.

Thirdly, the Government of the United States continues its policy of attempting to criminalize Puerto Rico's struggle for independence. Currently, that Government holds 18 independence-fighters in its prisons and, at the same time, it continues a judicial process against nine other well-known independence-militants. Repression in the form of constant surveillance and persecution continues against members of labour unions and independence organizations, peace advocates, environmentalists, poor communities - indeed, all those who struggle for the rights of the people. This repression is carried out by the local police and courts, as well as by United States Government agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), grand juries, federal courts, and so forth. There can be no doubt that the United States Government intends to continue to repress and imprison Puerto Ricans in an attempt to criminalize and defeat the struggles of the people, in all their forms, from labour and communal struggles to anti-colonial and socialist struggles.

Fourthly, the United States Government has insisted that all status alternatives, including independence, must guarantee the permanent presence of its military bases in Puerto Rico. Besides the bases in the island township of Vieques, these installations include Roosevelt Roads in the town of Ceiba, the largest military base in the Western Hemisphere. These bases represent a constant threat to the peace and security of our people and are used as springboards for acts of aggression against sister nations in the Caribbean and Central America. To cite just a few examples, the naval base Roosevelt Roads was used for the invasions of Cuba in 1961, the Dominican Republic in 1965, Grenada in 1983 and Panama in 1989. It also served as logistical support for the British Navy during the

(Mr. Quirós Méndez)

Falkland (Malvinas) war. As if all that were not enough, the United States military forces continuously violate the Treaty of Tlatelolco by maintaining nuclear arms in our territory, exposing the entire Caribbean to the risks of a nuclear accident.

For those reasons, the Steering Committee for a Socialist Front against the Plebiscite is convinced that the referendum promoted by the United States Government will not lead in any form to the decolonization of Puerto Rico or to the solution of the fundamental problems which afflict our people, problems created by the colonialism imposed on our country. An example of this is the crushing public debt - external debt that the colonial Government incurs in order to finance all its functions - which amounts to more than $12 billion. This enormous public debt means that each Puerto Rican owes $3,600, the largest per capita debt in the world. It is a direct result of the economic policies pursued by the colonial administrations maintained and supported by the United States Government.

(Mr. Quirós Méndez)

The United States Government is undoubtedly promoting the plebiscite process as another attempt to conceal the colonial status of the island, while guaranteeing its own political, economic and military interests. In our view, those conditions make the proposed plebiscite a sham, and therefore participation by the Puerto Rican people is unacceptable. Objectively, voting in the referendum would only legitimize a useless, deceptive and fraudulent process. No referendum on status promoted by those mainly responsible for colonial domination in Puerto Ricao will resolve the problem of colonialism or the grave problems that now afflict the Puerto Rican people.

Consequently, the Steering Committee for a Socialist Front against the Plebiscite has established as one of its priorities the development of a broad and militant boycott of the sham referendum promoted by the United States Government. Only the active participation of the Puerto Rican people, through the development and broadening of its struggle, will make possible the full exercise of our right to self-determination and independence.

In conclusion, we wish to recall that at the end of 1988 the General Assembly adopted resolution 43/47, which declares the period 1990-2000 to be the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism. During that Decade, colonialism in Puerto Rico will reach the 500-year mark in 1993, and colonialism under the rule of the United States Government will reach the 100-year mark in 1998. We therefore urge the free peoples of the world to be alert to the events in our country and to keep on their agenda the discussion of the colonial status of Puerto Rico. In that way they will be able to support us in this difficult but inevitably victorious struggle for our national liberation and the construction of a just and democratic society.

(Mr. Quirós Méndez)

The Commmittee's secretariat has been given a written statement from the Frente Patriotico Arecibeño, and we should like that to be included in the record.

Mr. Quirós Méndez withdrew.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mrs. Gloria Arjona (Instituto de Libre Enseñanza) took a place at the Committee table.

Mrs. ARJONA (interpretation from Spanish): In order to reduce a very lengthy statement to one that will take only five minutes to present, I shall read only a few paragraphs from the beginning and the final appeal. Those paragraphs, this statement, are dedicated to the first hundred Puerto Ricans who raised the issue of decolonization at the United Nations in 1947. The title of my statement is "The Tyranny of the Laboratory, ... or, The Island of Puerto Rico: Features of a Modern Tragedy".

In a short dissertation entitled "Prelude to Independence, the International Significance of the Declaration of Rights", delivered at Williamsburg during the observance of the 180th anniversary of the Virginia Declaration of Rights, Dag Hammarskjold said:

(spoke in English)

> "What was new in the Virginia Declaration of Rights was the formal recognition of human rights as part of written constitutional law. This recognition introduced a technique for the protection of the people not only against the tyranny of monarchs but also against the intolerance and tyranny of majorities."

(continued in Spanish)

Concern about social health and about wisdom had fuelled that valuable statement at Williamsburg from the outset. He continued:

(Mrs. Arjona)

(spoke in English)

"There is an intellectual freshness and clarity of thought about the period in American political history ... that cannot fail to attract everybody interested in a sound development of modern society."

(continued in Spanish)

In explaining the anonymity factor in the formulation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, he said,

(spoke in English)

"it may be called the universal expression in the field of human rights of the aims of our world of today, a world where the memory is still fresh of some of the worst infringements of human rights ever experienced in history and a world which is also facing the problem of human rights in new and increasingly complicated forms."

(continued in Spanish)

Then he asked:

(spoke in English)

"What is the right to security? Is it not the right to the free development of individual and national life within the limit set by the right of other parties to the same security? What is the right to freedom from attack? Is it not the right to freedom from fear?"

(continued in Spanish)

Linking the philosophy of individual rights with the basic principles involved in war and peace, he said:

(spoke in English)

"We all know how, when moved by fear, people may act against what others see as their own best interest. We know how, when people are afraid, they may act even against their own fundamental will. We have seen how, when

(Mrs. Arjona)

influenced by such actions, the course of events may take on aspects of inexorable fatality up to the point where, out of sheer weariness, no resistance to the gravitation into open conflict any longer seems possible. This is a constantly repeated pattern of tragedy."

(continued in Spanish)

After many hears of living in an illusion, Puerto Ricans are now threatened by a tragedy. The hopes of "sound development" of our "modern society" have been distorted, there is talk of a solution by plebiscite to the political issue, which should have been the first step taken.

I shall present some documented cross sections of that distortion. It is the development, on the basis of those documented cross sections, of a process of mental metamorphosis based on a pernicious totalitarian laboratory philosophy, which in turn is based on the slogan "Puerto Rica: Democracy's laboratory in Latin America".

Pressures from the office of the President of the United States, linked with the growth of a kind of psychology of happiness and complacency, not to say a fifth-column attitude, could bring about a tragic turn for our country - namely, that misguided majorities may destroy our identity as a people.

The cross sections I have chosen are from a specific period in our history, the 1940s, when, for reasons of national security, there was increased persecution of the strong national liberation movement and our country began to be seen in terms of the consolidation of an imperial economy and of democracy's laboratory in Latin America and when our people began living a lie as if it were the truth.

I shall show that no one paid attention to the wisdom of old political concepts, either in legislation or in petitions to the United States, and that the prevailing view of justice has gradually eroded its fundamentals. I analyse the

(Mrs. Arjona)

persecutions begun for imperialist purposes, and finally I draw an analogy with elements of classical tragedy, particularly as regards those wise people who made appeals to reason and appeals for awareness of traditional values, people whom nobody listened to at the time. I also analyse how the vacuum existing today could destroy our people, or our identity as a people.

To conclude, is not truth often stranger than fiction? We have reached the point where in order to avoid the destruction of Puerto Rico - that is, its internal capacity for self-government and ability to assist freely in the development of a universal world order - we may have to resort to the absurd situation of having to boycott a self-determination plebiscite. That is truly ironic. Through this we shall all learn that decisions for self-liberation and everything they signify must not come from outside; they must burst forth from the very soil of the people, and they must be taken at the right time.

(Mrs. Arjona)

We must not allow ourselves to be discouraged. The formula of hope must re-emerge and overcome defeatist attitudes. Each group seeking its own internal unity in freedom and all of them together uniting in a spirit of fraternity, we can achieve the fortitude that will frustrate our tragic destiny. Wisdom can lead us to realize the dreams of the crystal houses of the first utopia of Macondo in the great work of Garcia Marquez.

None of us is free from blind spots ourselves to the facts, past or present, in our eyesight or understanding. But this is not a time for recriminations, because it is also true that those who accept their destiny with dignity are uplifted by it, while those who resist it in desperation are annihilated by it. We must also recall that the Achaean heroes were immobilized for 10 years before the walls of Ilion for the same human reasons that originally drove them to war. It is time for an anagnorisis, time for a surprised awakening at the knocking on the door, for a peripeteia, a sudden turn of events to the sound of peace - time to turn back the tide, time for a revolution. Peripeteias in Greek drama sometimes changed unhappy events to happy ones. Let us use our persuasive powers to demonstrate that it is not good for the world to see the total annihilation of a people that has its own characteristics forged through history without neglecting the essential ontological values of our being human and our traditional and living culture.

Only if we do not lose our homeland can we live in peace, the creative peace that can be developed only in the context of a "sound development of society".

Mrs. Arjona withdrew.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Juan Mari Bras (Causa Comun Independentista) took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN: I call on Mr. Mari Bras.

Mr. MARI BRAS (Causa Comun Independentista) (interpretation from Spanish): In greeting the members of the Special Committee once again on behalf of the Puerto Rican people fighting for independence, I wish very briefly to state a few important points for your information and for the record.

First, the problem of Namibia having been resolved with the proclamation of that sister African nation's independence, which we celebrate as a great victory for all mankind, the case of Puerto Rico remains as the most important and oldest colonial situation being considered by the Special Committee in particular and by the United Nations in general.

Secondly, it is high time to cast aside any attempts at evasion or at concealing the fact that this case has been under continuous consideration by the United Nations consecutively and without interruption from 1972 to this day, or to disregard the inevitable results of that continued consideration of our case.

Thirdly, you may now see clearly that our situation is not a "cold war" case. It existed long before the "cold war" and has continued after the opposing parties proclaimed its end. That is because colonialism originates in one country's intervention and domination over another and does not end until the dominating country leaves the dominated country free to exercise its right to self-determination and independence without constraints.

Fourthly, as we stated on many previous occasions, we do not come here to ask you to decide for us something that the Puerto Rican people alone should decide. We have come here and continue to come here in order to ask you, as representatives of the international community, to carry out a function that is yours alone with regard to the decolonization of any people under foreign colonial domination. I refer to the function of defining the parameters within which all parties involved should promote decolonization. We ask you for a clear definition of the status of

(Mr. Mari Bras)

international law with regard to the colonial question of Puerto Rico, and this is tantamount to explaining what the position of international public opinion is on the matter. That is all you can offer, and therefore we do not ask you to go beyond that definition, but neither will we accept anything less. And I must repeat quite frankly that we are not asking you or anyone else for favours. We are asking you to fulfil an obligation which you accepted when you agreed to participate in a Special Committee responsible for the implementation of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV).

Fifthly, within the scope of your mandate, and specifically in the case of Puerto Rico, we say to you today that you must keep the forum of the United Nations open for a thorough examination of the case of Puerto Rico as soon as the dominating Power, the United States, takes action aimed at changing Puerto Rico's political status. It will be your task to assess the legislation, if any, adopted by the Congress of the United States, to promote such a change in the status of Puerto Rico. You will have to compare that legislation with the principles of international law governing decolonization, and you are the ones who will have to express the judgement of the international community on the procedure, if any, adopted by the Congress and the President of the United States. That judgement will reflect world opinion on the question. The rest will be our problem, that of Puerto Ricans. Whether we accept it or not, whether we change it through our struggle or meekly submit to what is imposed upon us by the dominators, will be our people's responsibility. As one who is familiar with the firmness and perseverance with which our heroic people has faced colonialism for centuries of continuous struggle and as one who has actively participated in the national resistance waged over the past 40 years, which made it possible for Puerto Rico to survive as a

(Mr. Mari Bras)

Caribbean and Latin American nation, I have not the slightest doubt that the people of Puerto Rico will respond as it should to any challenges that the coming drama may pose.

Sixthly, with regard to our expectations concerning what the United Nations should do about this colonial case, the oldest and most important one on its present decolonization agenda, the draft resolution proposed this year by Venezuela meets our expectations of what the Special Committee should do at this time.

(Mr. Mari Bras)

Furthermore, the draft resolution is extremely important because it reflects a turning-point in international solidarity with the liberation struggles of our people and a point in time at which Latin America, the region to which we belong as a people, is taking on and endorsing our case in the United Nations. The Latin Americanization of Puerto Rico's case at the United Nations, for which we have been asking our brother peoples for many years and which on various occasions has led many of us to travel to the capitals of South America, Central America, the Caribbean and Mexico, is now becoming a reality with this draft resolution, which is so significant for Puerto Ricans, especially at this moment in our history.

We wish to extend an embrace of solidarity, reflecting the gratitude of our country, to the sponsors of the draft resolution, and we urge other members of the Special Committee to endorse it by their vote. The rest, I repeat, will be up to us. The people of Puerto Rico will respond fully to all members and put before the Committee the great historic feat which no doubt will bring about the end of the task begun by Bolivar in the Americas: the emergence of independence in the last Territory in the Americas which, although a nation, has not yet attained full national sovereignty.

Mr. Mari Bras withdrew.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Selva Nebbia (Socialist Workers Party) took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN: I call on Ms. Nebbia.

Ms. NEBBIA (interpretation from Spanish): My name is Selva Nebbia. I am appearing before the Committee on behalf of the Socialist Workers Party of the United States. I am accompanied by my colleague, Don Rojas.

As others have documented well in their testimony here, Puerto Rico is a colony of the United States. A colony of Spain for 400 years, the island came under United States colonial rule more than 90 years ago. The barbarity of that relationship is highlighted by the fact that the great majority of people living under colonial rule in this century have broken away from their masters and established dozens of independent countries, almost all of them since the end of the Second World War. In Asia, Africa, the Middle East, the Pacific and the Americas, hundreds of millions of people have waged victorious struggles against their colonial oppressors. The independence struggles from India to Grenada, from Iraq to Indonesia, have succeeded in bringing down vast colonial empires whose centres were in Europe.

Just last year, after decades of colonial rule, Namibia in southern Africa won its independence from South Africa's apartheid régime.

Breaking the yoke of colonial oppression has put the peoples of those countries in a better position to continue their struggle towards full independence from imperialist exploitation.

The Puerto Rican people, however, remains one of the peoples still living in economic, social and political subjugation under direct colonial rule. They suffer the same fate as the peoples of Hong Kong, New Caledonia, Martinique, Guadalupe, Guam, Curaçao, the Malvinas (Falkland) Islands and others that remain under colonial domination.

The United States itself, formed by 13 colonies that broke free from British rule more than 200 years ago, is today the only country in the Americas that has colonies.

(Ms. Nebbia)

What has colonialism brought to Puerto Rico? It has meant that the rich have become richer and the poor poorer. Washington boasts that Operation Bootstrap, an economic programme launched in Puerto Rico in late 1940, turned the island into a showcase of progress for Latin America. Even though Puerto Rico's economic and industrial development has been far greater than that of most other countries in the region, the benefits are distributed very unequally. Inequalities in Puerto Rico have grown worse, and the differences between the living standards of even the poorest States in the United States and those in Puerto Rico have widened. Per capita income in Puerto Rico is less than half of the United States average.

The devastating conditions on the island have led to the division of the Puerto Rican nation, with 4 out of every 10 Puerto Ricans forced to emigrate to the United States in search of work and a living wage. There are currently 2.5 million Puerto Ricans in the United States, and they are among the most oppressed in the country.

In the countryside colonialism has driven the majority of Puerto Ricans from their farmlands, so that today Puerto Rico, a rich and verdant land, has to import nearly 90 per cent of its food supply.

Colonial rule has brought accelerated degradation of Puerto Rico's environment. Thousands of hectares of our tropical forests have been destroyed, and the rest are threatened with destruction. The waters, the soil and the air of the island have been polluted by the large transnational corporations which produce chemical and petroleum products and which have received enormous tax exemptions and have free rein on the island.

United States colonialism has meant the abridgement and denial of the democratic rights of the Puerto Rican people, with more than 100,000 names on the so-called subversive lists of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and dozens of Puerto Ricans convicted on false charges and serving outrageous sentences in

(Ms. Nebbia)

United States prisons for supporting their country's independence - fighters such as Alejandrina Torres, who has been subjected to the most inhuman conditions while incarcerated, and the many other political prisoners who are confined hundreds of miles away from their families and communities.

Colonialism means the presence of military occupation forces, with more than 13 per cent of the island's territory usurped by United States military bases. Today, for example, the United States Navy controls more than two thirds of the Puerto Rican island of Vieques. Moreover, submarines carrying nuclear weapons are cruising in neighbouring waters and calling at Puerto Rico's harbours.

Since the Second World War a significant working class has emerged in Puerto Rico, and recently there have been signs of growing struggle. This was seen last March when tens of thousands of workers staged a one-day protest strike and mobilized more than 100,000 Puerto Rican workers and their supporters in the streets of San Juan. They demanded something that has become the watchword of many demonstrations throughout Latin America: "No to the privatization of public services". The protesters denounced the proposed sale of the two Government-owned telephone companies.

The more than 500-day International Association of Machinists strike against Eastern Airlines has been the most important recent test of whether the airlines, and indeed United States employers in general, will be able to get away with their attempt to break trade unions and reorganize on a non-union basis. From the beginning, this has been an international fight that includes Eastern Airlines workers in Puerto Rico, Canada and Bermuda, as well as in the United States.

This struggle has deepened the solidarity that prevails between unionists in the United States and in Puerto Rico, and Puerto Rican workers are reaching across the island's frontiers to forge more links of this kind. Just a couple of weeks ago a delegation of Puerto Rican telephone-company workers set up a picket line in

(Ms. Nebbia)

downtown Manhattan with fellow unionists from the Communication Workers of America. They also joined more than 200 Eastern Airlines strikers and their supporters at LaGuardia Airport a couple of days later to express their solidarity with the strike.

Those links and bridges that are being built between workers in Puerto Rico and workers in the United States are helping to bring down the walls that colonial domination has erected between them. They are undermining racism and scoring victories against the national chauvinism of United States workers.

(Ms. Nebbia)

Moreover, they help buttress the truth that workers in Puerto Rico and in the United States have a common enemy: the multi-millionaire families that dominate the economic and political life of both countries. United States workers have nothing to gain from colonial domination in Puerto Rico; they can and will be won over to the fight against Washington's colonial oppression of the island.

Two months ago, when New York was welcoming South African freedom fighter Nelson Mandela, Puerto Rican freedom fighters also came out into the streets and joined the hundreds of thousands in this city who celebrated the event, thus making the struggle against apartheid their own.

Today, after 92 years of domination over Puerto Rico, the United States Government argues that this Committee should not bring the moral weight of its decision to bear, that it should not condemn this outright violation of the Charter of the United Nations and take a clear stand against colonialism. Washington argues, as it did last year, that the Special Committee should not express a judgement because a United States congressional committee is considering the holding of a referendum on Puerto Rico's future status.

Throughout the entire history of colonialism, ruling Powers have tried to cloak their domination behind referendums. Such votes are taken under conditions that intimidate and repress anyone and any organization that favours independence. The blackmail of economic reprisals is used against the entire population.

Whatever the Congress of the United States may decide concerning a referendum - including whether or not it is binding and who may or may not participate - should not prevent the members of the Special Committee on decolonization from recognizing and condemning the ongoing United States colonial rule of Puerto Rico. The perpetuation of that domination runs counter to the interests of the people of the United States and of all the world's peoples.

(Ms. Nebbia)

The United Nations has a moral and political obligation to adopt a resolution reaffirming the right of Puerto Rico to self-determination and condemning Washington's continued domination of the island.

I thank the Chairman and members of the Committee for this opportunity to participate in their deliberations.

Ms. Nebbia withdrew.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Erasto Zayas Nuñez (Gran Oriente Interamericano de Puerto Rico) took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN: I call on Mr. Zayas Nuñez.

Mr. ZAYAS NUÑEZ (interpretation from Spanish): My name is Erasto Zayas Nuñez; accompanying me is Mr. Raul A. Morales Melendez. We are here as spokesmen of the Gran Oriente Interamericano de Puerto Rico, a Masonic organization with its headquarters in the Valleys of San Juan, Puerto Rico, and as an integral part of a people struggling for independence.

A year ago we stated before this Committee, and we reaffirm today with even greater vigour, that the process the United States of America has begun in our country with a view to imposing a referendum on the colonial situation, far from conforming to international law as recognized by the Committee and far from providing a genuinely decolonizing solution, is intended to validate the colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States.

Resolution 1514 (XV), adopted by the General Assembly on 14 December 1960, expressly sets out the role the international community has delegated to that body with respect to promoting the transition of colonial countries to full independence in the context of a recognition that these are irreversible and inevitable historical processes. To that end, there can be no conditions or reservations concerning the transfer of sovereign power to those peoples by the metropolitan Powers.

(Mr. Zayas Nuñez)

The resolution adopted last year by the Special Committee clearly reaffirmed the inalienable right of our people to self-determination and independence in conformity with resolution 1514 (XV).

There can be no legitimate exercise of a people's right of self-determination so long as there has been no full transfer of powers and so long as that people's sovereignty continues to be subjected to the political and military apparatus of the subjugating people. It is the responsibility of the Special Committee to guarantee that General Assembly resolutions are observed irrespective of the economic, political or military power of the oppressor State. The Committee cannot allow the imposition upon our people of measures that would have been unacceptable to its members had they been applied to their peoples in the past - or today or in the future.

The referendum process the United States is currently directing in Puerto Rico - like any political process with human protagonists - is supported by various sectors of our country. But it is also rejected by broad sectors. With a view to promoting positions that advance specific objectives, within the circles of power of the United States of America there has been no lack of direct interference in this debate - even by the President of the United States and by members of the legislative and judicial branches. Many of the statements the Special Committee will hear will be aimed at denying the jurisdiction of this body in the colonial problem of Puerto Rico.

This is a corrupted and distorted process, and its very origin makes it illegitimate. It is a plan developed not by the people itself, but by the Congress of the United States. It is a political plan, whose format will be determined by Congress, without any commitment to abide by its results; without a prior transfer of sovereign power to our people; without any United Nations supervision; without

(Mr. Zayas Nuñez)

recognition of Puerto Rico's right to enjoy a legal and political transition during which a constituent assembly could be convened with representation for the three decolonization formulas and which the United Nations could monitor; without amnesty for our political prisoners and prisoners of war, many of whom have already served more than 10 years of a multi-decade sentence; without the demilitarization of the country; without ensuring the right of participation in any referendum to tens of thousands of Puerto Ricans who live in the United States; and without an end to repression and persecution directed against the pro-independence and patriotic movement. It is under those conditions that our people is summoned to participate in a so-called solution to its colonial status.

International law exists not to keep peoples in, or hurl peoples into, a historical vacuum where they lose their identity; on the contrary, it exists to guarantee the equal right of every people to enjoy the same prerogatives and obligations. There can be no equality based on oppression.

The Gran Oriente Interamericano de Puerto Rico, a Masonic organization, asks the Committee on decolonization to adopt a resolution on Puerto Rico calling on the United States to comply unconditionally with international law and with the substantive and procedural requirements that must govern any process of decolonization. We also ask that the United Nations should actively carry out its duty to monitor and supervise that process. Lastly, the Committee should not tolerate another fraud, such as the one endorsed by General Assembly resolution 748 (VIII) of 1953, and we call on the Committee to remain alert and prevent the endorsement of the current process in our country aimed at papering over the colonial nature of the relationship between Puerto Rico and the Government of the United States of America.

Mr. Zayas Nuñez withdrew.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Manuel de J. Feliciano (Gran Oriente Nacional de Puerto Rico) took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN: I call on Mr. Feliciano.

Mr. FELICIANO (interpretation from Spanish): I am a member of the Gran Oriente Nacional de Puerto Rico, which last month submitted to you the entire presentation I am making today. So that other colleagues can participate, I shall read out only the preamble to my statement.

With me today is my fellow Mason Irving Flores. When I have finished my reading of the preamble, I shall ask you, Mr. Chairman, to allow him briefly to explain the reason for his presence.

Inhabited by natives who lived on scarce natural resources, the island of Puerto Rico, the smallest of the Greater Antilles, first suffered military intervention in the year 1493, when the hosts of Juan Ponce de León conquered the lands of America in the name of Spain.

The early centuries of colonization and conquest proceeded side by side with the development of Latin America, with which came the development of the mining industry and the exploitation of indigenous people and black people, which continued until the original inhabitants were totally exterminated. Today there remain but a few, though important, traces of their magnificent culture.

The first three centuries of conquest were characterized by Europe's vast ambition to obtain as many economic resources as could be taken from Puerto Rico and to sell its agricultural products, commodities and even manpower, converting the population into faithful slaves subjected to total servility.

It was not until the nineteenth century that the first flags of freedom were raised and the just call of Simon Bolivar began liberating all of Latin America from the Spanish empire. It was in the early part of that century that a genuine cultural identity began to be forged, that of what we now call Puerto Ricans.

The intellectuals who developed a literature, who discovered new forms of art and politics, were associated with feelings of freedom that had nothing to do with any desire that the new national culture be permament.

(Mr. Feliciano)

The Spaniards who governed the island throughout that century coldly set about repressing those endeavours. The popular revolt and the slave revolt followed each other, while the courts of Cadiz called for greater autonomy for the newly formed nation.

Set upon by dictatorship, the Puerto Rican workers and separatist intellectuals raised the first and most important cry of the revolution of that century, which in Puerto Rico we call the cry of Lares, in September 1868. That first attempt at freedom was ill-fated because of treasonable activities. From then on, the consciences of Spaniards were disturbed by the prospect of a new cry, and there were periods of torture and murder such as the period of "compontes" in 1887, when more than 400 Puerto Ricans identified with the cause of freedom were tortured or disappeared.

The Cuban revolution of 1895 rekindled the flames of rebellion. While armed uprisings were prosecuted, some sectors of the bourgeousie made a compact of autonomy, which was finally granted in 1897. The freedom lasted for seven months. In 1898 United States warships took the island by storm, bombarding it and occupying small interior villages all the way to the capital, thus fulfilling the call for an invasion that was named the Spanish-American war. The island of Puerto Rico was offered to the United States as a prize of war under the Paris Treaty, which was signed by both of the Powers that year.

From 1898 on, United States militias took possession of townships and government departments, imposing their styles, their ways of thinking, their culture. From that year on, the injection of an outside culture and a policy that was in all ways colonialist ran up against the best interests of the Puerto Rican identity already forged in the teachings of Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos, who in the decade of the 1930s was proclaimed the greatest leader of Puerto Rican nationalism.

(Mr. Feliciano)

The return of a patriotic national awareness led to terrible acts of violence by the United States Government against the civilian population. We must highlight the Ponce massacre as the most abominable political crime of our history: 19 people were massacred, among them nationalists and civilians. This was the point of departure for the bloody struggle that followed, which left, as an imprint of honour and patriotism, the armed revolution of 1950, which was repressed by the United States national guard and army, and hundreds of Puerto Ricans were imprisoned.

With the nationalist leaders locked away and being tortured in United States prisons, the Popular Democratic Party of Puerto Rico began a process of legal and economic agreements that led the way to a so-called free-associated-state status, which today still pretends - though it fails utterly - to mask the humiliation of colonialism with the façade of democratic autonomy.

Since then the debate on decolonization has been maintained by politicians, intellectuals and workers, who call for a final definition.

Puerto Rico has been a colony for nearly 500 years, 92 of them under United States rule, and there has been no gesture, no token of the "freedom and democracy" in whose name it applies such pressure and engages in so many attacks against other powers of the planet.

On the contrary, the United States is on a war-footing against Puerto Rico, and in that war it is using every technological, economic and psychological means available to achieve its objective and re-establish conformity among a broad sector of the population.

The right of a colony to engage in armed or unarmed struggle against the colonizing country is guaranteed by the United Nations Charter, which was signed in 1947, to which the United States is a signatory.

(Mr. Feliciano)

A key moment has now arrived. The United States is proposing and urging that the local authorities hold a plebiscite to decide on a formula for status: statehood, so-called independent status or independence. But that plebiscite would be entirely controlled by the United States Congress, which has arrogated to itself the right to legislate, to set qualifications and to control the wording of the law in this regard. Because of this situation, which will in any event in no way affect the decision our people will make, it is imperative that Puerto Rico receive a transfer of power in conformity with the rules of international law that apply in such cases. Otherwise, after the so-called referendum, the Puerto Rican people will face a terrible decision. The results might be undermined by the great percentage of foreigners living on the island.

It is the natural destiny of every nation to exercise its sovereignty. Puerto Rico has been prevented from exercising that elementary right. Since it became aware of its colonial status it has not been allowed to exercise its options or to struggle for alternatives. On the contrary, assimilation into United States culture seems to be one of the basic goals of annexation. Such assimilation means rejection of our vernacular language, Spanish, and the marginalization of our dearest forms of popular culture.

The plebiscite process has sowed panic among the Puerto Rican people because of the lack of information and the suspicion that the matter will not be resolved democratically and that in the final analysis the Puerto Ricans will have very little to do with the final solution.

(Mr. Feliciano)

The possible disappearance of an entire nation is at issue. For the national identity and for the future of 4 million Puerto Ricans this is the most decisive and dramatic moment of their history. It is a critical moment because Puerto Rico is one of the last colonies in the Americas, and it has the moral right to stand on its own feet. The giant wants to keep it on its knees, but he will not succeed.

In conclusion, I should like to draw attention to the patriotic example given to us by my fellow Mason, Irving Flores, by Lolita Lebron and by Rafael Cancel Miranda. I urge each member of the Special Committee on decolonization to analyse it and to ask himself how many minutes, hours, days or years of persecution and imprisonment have been suffered by Puerto Ricans in their struggle for national independence.

Mr. Feliciano withdrew.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Elsie Valdés, Puertorriqueños Pro Estadidad, Inc., took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN: I call on Ms. Valdés.

Mrs. VALDES (interpretation from Spanish): My name is Elsie Valdés. I am a teacher at a public secondary school in Puerto Rico. At present I am the President of Puertorriqueños Pro Estadidad, Inc. With me is Mrs. Pura Barreto from the town of Ceiba.

Once again, for the sixth consecutive year, we come before the Special Committee on decolonization, as part of our decolonization efforts, making it clear that our organization holds the firm position that the colonial problem of the island is an internal matter between the Government of the United States and the American citizens of Puerto Rico. Accordingly, the United Nations should allow the two parties to exhaust all mechanisms available to them to find an internal solution to the colonial problem of Puerto Rico. The Committee should be an observer of the process.

(Ms. Valdés)

As members of the Committee know, since January 1989 the three political parties of Puerto Rico and the Federal Congress have been working towards the adoption by Congress of a law that would authorize the holding of a referendum on the political status of Puerto Rico at some time next year. That referendum would offer voters the following alternatives: statehood, independence or the current colonial status of Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth is a colony and will continue to be so because it lacks and will continue to lack the fundamental and essential element of sovereignty. That political status is and always will be subject to the territorial clause of the United States Constitution, which grants full sovereign powers to Congress over the territories and property of the United States Government, as is the case with the Commonwealth.

We condemn the inclusion of the Commonwealth as an alternative in the decolonization process of the referendum, because a colony cannot be a solution to colonialism. Regardless of the language that may be used in Congress to try to legitimize such an illegitimate colonial status as the Commonwealth, the Committee knows and we know that the formula is and will continue to be that of a colony and that its unlikely victory in the referendum would not resolve the problem of the political status of Puerto Rico.

The Federal Congress will resume consideration of the question of Puerto Rico beginning in the first week of September. We hope that the Sub-Committee on Insular and International Affairs will thereafter adopt its version of the referendum bill, which would be put to the vote in the House. We also hope that the Senate's version of the bill will be put to the vote in the Senate. At a later date, a conference committee of the two houses will be set up to reconcile their different versions and thus agree on the final version that will authorize the holding of the referendum in 1991.

(Ms. Valdés)

Those in favour of colonialism have made many attempts in Congress to prove the sovereignty of the Commonwealth. Obviously, those attempts have failed, since Congress cannot renounce its constitutional mandate to exercise sovereignty over the territories.

However, we feel concern about several things. As we say in our country, we are not going to cover the sky with our hands. We should like to put the facts before the Committee now. One of the situations that concern us is that the delegate of the United States Virgin Islands, Ron de Lugo, who is Chairman of the Sub-Committee on Insular and International Affairs of the House of Representatives and whom we consider to be an ally of Puerto Rican colonialists, can arrange matters so that the House approves a definition of "commonwealth" with deceitful and ambiguous language, enabling colonialists to confuse Puerto Ricans, alleging that such a territorial and colonial formula would bring about sovereignty after the referendum.

No political body subject to the territorial clause of the United States Constitution - which is the case with the Commonwealth today - can cease to be a territory or a colony unless it chooses statehood or independence. In other words, so long as the Commonwealth remains what it is, it will continue to be a colony subject to the territorial clause and the full sovereignty of a Congress in which the American citizens of Puerto Rico are not represented as the American citizens residing in the other States are.

We wish to emphasize two factors that the colonialists have manipulated in order to derail the holding of the referendum in 1991 because they know that they will lose, a fact which even their own polls confirm. Those factors relate, first, to the absentee ballot and, secondly, to parity of Federal funds for the Commonwealth. The first factor is a proposal to enable Puerto Ricans residing in

(Ms. Valdés)

the 50 States of the United States to vote in the referendum, a question that we put before the Committee last year, since it was our understanding at that time that it would be significant in the referendum process. We wish to explain this in more detail today.

(Ms. Valdés)

The present Governor of Puerto Rico, Rafael Hernandez Colon - the principal leader of the colonialist movement - has hypocritically embraced this proposal in an attempt to justify hindering or possibly postponing the exercise of the right to self-determination by more than 2 million Puerto Rican voters living in Puerto Rico.

The proposal, contained in an amendment put forward by the Puerto Rican Congressman from New York, José Serrano, has given rise to great controversy because of the procedural obstacles - so far unresolved - that would arise if more than 1 million Puerto Ricans of voting age residing in the 50 States were to participate in the plebiscite. These obstacles could result in the postponement of the plebiscite - I repeat: the postponement of the plebiscite - and the dangerous possibility of massive fraud, since the personnel and mechanisms necessary for the organization of the process would not be available on time.

There are other circumstances that also make the implementation of this proposal difficult, but since there are so many speakers on this subject, I shall limit myself to submitting all these circumstances in a written statement. We are putting before the Committee six basic factors that explain the situation, and we would ask the Committee to take note of them and consider them.

The vast majority of Puerto Ricans living in the United States have an opportunity to live life to the full here. They have property, they pay taxes, they have jobs and they exercise all the rights of an American citizen - rights that cannot be exercised in Puerto Rico because it is a colonial Territory. Despite the fact that they are Puerto Ricans by birth, their legal status is different from that of Puerto Ricans who experience the colonial system firsthand each day of their lives. These factors that I have mentioned and the ones that I shall submit in writing could lead many Puerto Ricans living in the United States to take an unwise decision with regard to the colonial problem of the island.

(Ms. Valdés)

Indeed, Congressman Serrano himself, although he is the author of this amendment, has stated publicly that he will continue to live in New York City and that he wishes to be buried here when he dies. Serrano will have to be responsible for his own deeds, because his involvements and his vested interests have affected his own amendment. He is solely to blame for the fact that there has been such a delay about the absentee-ballot question.

We understand that if anyone were to put forward reasonable alternatives in order to save that proposal, it would be possible to endorse it - and we would be among those doing so. However, no one - not even the proponents, not even the Governor of Puerto Rico, not even Congressman Serrano - has put forward any alternatives. Do such alternatives not exist? Or does none of these persons have any viable solutions to offer?

This question has thus become a means to derail the holding of the plebiscite in 1991. Although we would like to find a formula for implementation, it is getting very late and is becoming increasingly difficult to do so.

It would be unfair if some Puerto Ricans who live in the United States and who wish to vote in the plebiscite were able to undermine or bring about the postponement of what is desired by the Puerto Ricans living in Puerto Rico, who, because of the colonial commonwealth status, do not enjoy the full rights and benefits of United States citizenship and have to pay the highest taxes, earn the lowest wages and endure the most deficient infrastructure and educational and health services.

A desire cannot supersede a right. That is our position with regard to this proposal. However, we agree that the electoral laws of Puerto Rico should be reasonably amended in order to broaden the parameters of absentee balloting. We are also submitting to the Committee in writing several suggestions to that end.

(Ms. Valdés)

We believe that the electoral law could be made more flexible by including participation in the plebiscite by some Puerto Ricans who live in the United States, but not to the point of extending the right to persons who have no real expectation of returning to the island. That is the aim of the amendment by Congressman Serrano, who seeks only to advance his personal interests: elections are to take place soon in New York. This position is similar to that of Congressman Rangel on other items.

I repeat: I have not come here to "block out the sky with my hand", although I do want statehood for Puerto Rico.

There is another point that I wish to put before the Committee and that shows that the colonialists are irresponsible and manipulative when they try to hoodwink the people of Puerto Rico. I refer to the amendments to the plan for the plebiscite submitted in the Federal Senate, amendments which were adopted on a preliminary basis by the Finance Committee. Under those amendments, if the commonwealth formula were to win in the plebiscite, the cost accrued during the first three years, 1993 to 1995, by increasing only three Federal programmes that would be recognized under the commonwealth status - that is, supplementary social security, Medicaid and welfare - would amount to $1,592,000,000 for participating individuals, as compared to $2,607,000,000 if there were statehood during the same period.

Under the commonwealth formula, the people of Puerto Rico would have to pay all those alleged increases in federal funds, to be paid into the federal treasury. I shall present to the Committee also in writing the reasons which are advanced to support this alleged parity but which do not in fact exist. From what I shall submit the Committee will see that, in addition to being humiliating and unworthy, the commonwealth status is unfair to the Puerto Ricans.

(Ms. Valdés)

On the other hand, colonialists have complained about statements by the President of the United States, George Bush, who expressed a personal preference for statehood. He said that this would be the wish expressed by the majority of the Puerto Ricans in the 1991 plebiscite. In making such statements, President Bush has had recourse to the freedom of speech guaranteed under the Constitution of the United States. He has that right just as all of us have.

Finally, although we consider that the problem of Puerto Rico's political status should be solved by the American citizens of Puerto Rico and the United States Government, we wish to state clearly today that if the Federal Congress were to yield to the covert pressures of the colonialists and their allies and derail this decolonization process, which should end in 1991, we would come before the United Nations, as we have been doing year after year, to seek suggestions - I repeat: suggestions - for a process that could be carried out in the short term, since Puerto Rican residents are the only ones with the right to take the final decision. We wish, however, to repeat today the position we have always maintained - namely, that both parties, the people of Puerto Rico and the people of the United States represented in its Congress, should exhaust all possible mechanisms and the United Nations should be observers of the process.

(Ms. Valdés)

For the moment, we propose that the Committee should respect the process and recognize statehood, or the island's integration into the United States, as an inalienable right of the American citizens of Puerto Rico. We shall continue to endorse statehood, while respecting the right of the Puerto Rican people to self-determination.

In conclusion, I wish to add something to my prepared statement. I respectfully request that at such meetings in future years the Committee should give the same right to all those of us who come here with petitions. Yesterday and today there have been certain irregularities, including irregularities with regard to the order of speakers. We were told that they would be heard in the order in which their petitions had been received, but the procedure was changed so that the fourth petitioner spoke first and the twenty-sixth spoke fifth, and there have been several instances of individuals taking the turn of others without having even submitted the petition.

Moreover, there are persons who present themselves here as speakers, petitioners or people accompanying petititioners but whom we later see as journalists, lobbyists or employees with free access to all the Committee's offices. The rest of us who come here do not enjoy that right.

Similarly, many party leaders have access to draft resolutions and to knowledge of what will happen before the rest of us here, with the same interests and rights, have access to them.

I am very sorry to have to mention these matters, but we value the work that the Committee does, and we should not like ever to see such a forum commit the same irregularities as we find in other places, because the working of a democratic process requires observance of equal rights, the only thing that guarantees true freedoms.

The CHAIRMAN: I should like to point out to Ms. Valdés that the Committee has its own criteria for selecting petitioners to come, and they are applied equitably and fairly. What happens to individuals outside the Committee is not the Committee's business. They can be of various professions and stature outside the Committee, but here they are bona fide petitioners interested in the cause, people who the Committee is convinced will contribute to the deliberations on the item.

Ms. Valdés withdrew.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Freddy Vélez Garcia (Centro de Estudios Estadistas) took a place at the Committee table.

Mr. VELEZ GARCIA (interpretation from Spanish): My name is Freddy Vélez Garcia. I am appearing before the Committee as Executive Director of the Centro de Estudios Estadistas, an organization created in 1988 by a group of young Puerto Rican professionals to carry out specialized studies that will help to support the petition by the Puerto Rican people to be admitted into the American union as a sovereign State.

I wish first to put on the record a statement made by a distinguished Puerto Rican historian, Dr. Pilar Barbosa de Rosario, on 27 July last during the celebration of the one hundred and thirty-third anniversary of the birth of her father, Dr. Jose Celso Barbosa. Dr. Jose Celso Barbosa is one of the three leading Puerto Rican figures whose birthdays we celebrate as national holidays every year, the other two being the independence leader Jose de Diego and the pro-autonomy leader Luis Muñoz Rivera.

As his daughter said, in the veins of Barbosa flowed the white blood of his Puerto Rican grandmother, the black blood of his Portuguese grandfather and the Indian blood of his mother, from the Venezuelan Andes. That mixture of races made him by definition a Criollo, a son of the Puerto Rican soil. As a result of that

(Mr. Vélez Garcia)

mixture of blood he was treated with discrimination and contempt by the imperialist and racist Spanish society which 400 years earlier had exterminated the native Taino race of Puerto Rico and which at the end of the nineteenth century denied Barbosa the right to study medicine. He had to move to the city of Ann Arbor, Michigan, to study medicine, and he was able to follow his profession on returning to Puerto Rico only as a result of the vigorous intercession of the United States consul with the Spanish authorities.

Barbosa died 69 years ago, in 1921. In addition to bequeathing to Puerto Rico the statehood movement which he founded, he left his daughter Pilar, who has continued disseminating his work and his ideals. Her 93 years make it impossible for her to come here, and she has therefore asked us to speak on her behalf and urge the Committee to refrain from intervening in the Puerto Rican decolonization process at this time.

It will be clear to the members of the Committee that they are not faced with a traditional colonial situation. The situation in Puerto Rico does not involve an imperial and colonialist Power trying to retain a productive colony at all costs, nor a colonized country sunk in misery and ignorance.

On the contrary, the metropolitan Power is one which operates within a legal, constitutional framework, which allows its territories free self-determination and which is now making the exercise of that right possible through a planned referendum which is in the process of being approved by Congress.

Nor is Puerto Rico a country steeped in ignorance; rather, it is an island whose people is better educated than any neighbouring people, one with a tradition of democratic participation whose roots are quantifiably deeper than in the case of the United States itself.

(Mr. Vélez Garcia)

Against that background, the United Nations should take note of recent events aimed at the holding of a referendum in 1991, observe them and refrain from intervening, directly or indirectly.

During these meetings, the Committee will have before it many petitions, most of them favouring decolonization, either through the establishment of a sovereign republic or through the proclamation of Puerto Rico as a sovereign State and its admission to the American nation. Sadly, the Committee will also hear a minority that, to its shame, does not want Puerto Rico to be decolonized.

To conclude, I should like to draw attention to how Dr. Jose Celso Barbosa, without being physically present today, describes this situation, as follows:

> "I must say that if I were credibly informed that Puerto Rico was to be a colony permanently, a 'branch' of the large factory, I would protest, even in the face of cannon fire, and I would die protesting."

He died four months after saying those words. He continued:

> "For that reason I sympathize with the advocates of independence, whose ideals are pure, because they are with us in their highest aspirations. They want separate sovereignty, the national sovereignty of Puerto Rico; we want that same sovereignty, within the great American Union. To call for anything else ... is to continue deceiving the people."

Once again we ask the Committee to refrain from intervening in the Puerto Rican decolonization process at this time and to confine itself to observing events.

Mr. Vélez Garcia withdrew.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Juan C. Lizardi (Juventud Estadista No Partidista) took a place at the Committee table.

Mr. LIZARDI (Juventud Estadista No Partidista) (interpretation from Spanish): It is an honour for my organization to explain to you our position relating to the determination of Puerto Rico's political future.

My name is Juan Carlos Lizardi. I represent Juventud Estadista No Partidista, presided over by Mr. Antero Aponte Jr. I am accompanied by Brenda Flores, the delegate from the Bronx, New York, to our organization. We are before you here for the third time. Our group is made up of young Puerto Ricans who have given themselves the task of orienting our youth towards statehood without following any party line. We concentrate primarily on new voters who will exercise the franchise for the first time.

Our statement will be given in Spanish because it is our native language and the most practical means for many of us to express our ideas.

We endorse statehood for Puerto Rico from different local or national partisan points of view. An example of this is our group of co-ordinators. Mr. Antero Aponte Jr. is a voter of the Partido Nuevo Progresista. Ms. Grisel Martinez endorses the Republican Party at the national level, Brenda Flores endorses the Young Democrats in the United States, and my own sympathies are with the district leadership of the Partido Popular Democratico of Puerto Rico. Our group's unity is based on the search for alternatives for a possible solution to the social and economic problems affecting all young people. The solution that we have found to be feasible for Puerto Rico is union with the United States. We reiterate our position of past years that it is necessary to unify the Puerto Rican family for the security of our homeland's future. Today's young students are the ones who will benefit or suffer from tomorrow's developments. We must and have the duty to participate in our country's decisions. Defining the political destiny of Puerto Rico requires active participation by all young people, a participation that the local political parties and the Government often deny us.

(Mr. Lizardi)

Respect for human dignity can be achieved in our country only by the final definition of "status". Once Puerto Rico decides its political destiny, democratic participation will give us firm roots and revive our confidence in our governmental institutions.

We have come before you to ask you to be observers of the process between the Puerto Rican people and the Congress of the United States in a democratic plan for defining our status.

In 1946, during the first year of the existence of the United Nations, the United States of America voluntarily offered to submit annual reports on the status of its Non-Self-Governing Territories in conformity with Article 73 of the Charter. At that time, those Territories were Alaska, Guam, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, American Samoa and the United States Virgin Islands. Submission of the reports on Alaska and Hawaii was discontinued in 1959, when those Territories were admitted as the forty-ninth and fiftieth states of the Union. On 27 November 1953, the General Assembly adopted resolution 748 (VIII), relieving the United States of the obligation to submit reports on the political status of Puerto Rico:

> "... in the framework of their Constitution and of the compact agreed upon with the United States of America, the people of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico have been invested with attributes of political sovereignty which clearly identify the status of self-government attained by the Puerto Rican people as that of an autonomous political entity". (General Assembly resolution 748 (III))

The political reality existing in our country since that time has been different: we have been subjected to colonialism. The Commonwealth does not represent any degree of sovereignty for our people. The colonialists have made countless attempts to validate the Commonwealth.

(Mr. Lizardi)

In defining our political destiny, we endorse statehood because it represents for young people the end of all the lies we have heard from the colonialists; security and stability; quality education for our youth, the future leaders of the country; broad growth and social and economic expansion; spiritual tranquillity for the whole population; participation by all the leaders who advocate different formulas, serving the people on an equal footing; a call for pooling the strength of the whole people; active intervention on an equal footing by all the States of the nation; effective integration of all social and economic resources; the achievement of excellence in our educational institutions; and genuine participation in the political and governmental process.

Young Puerto Ricans are prepared to work side by side with their families and society in calling for constitutional changes for our people because we feel worthy and capable of facing this task. The people must achieve integrated education and development, which has been promised from the outset by our Constitution but which has remained merely a promise.

Definition is urgent if we are to have stable education. Education is the only bulwark that can be successful. We need the support of the family in the educational process. It is important to educate and provide guidance for young people before the final decision. Achieving it is in our hands. The educational renewal required at this time can be achieved only on a stable basis. It is a broad and complex process. We Puerto Ricans can achieve it. Our study programmes are aimed at understanding in greater depth the elements that form the various components of Puerto Rican culture and their relationship to other countries; enjoyment and understanding of our cultural values for the present and future generations; dissemination and greater appreciation of our cultural heritage; and revision of educational and training programmes in accordance with the country's

(Mr. Lizardi)

needs. We have been promised such a revision with the present educational reform, which is just one more deception, like all of the coloinal Government's promises.

Our organization reiterates its support for statehood because it represents our future stability.

I personally will continue to be a supporter of the Partido Popular and its leadership, but in my opinion, this is not a formula for decolonization. Accordingly we shall participate together in programming a formula outside party lines, as Youth for Statehood. The choice of the majority will be statehood. You should be observers of the process.

Mr. Lizardi withdrew.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. José Manuel Torres Santiago (Comité Pedro Albizu Campos) took a place at the Committee table.

Mr. TORRES SANTIAGO (interpretation from Spanish): My name is José Manuel Torres Santiago. With me is Mr. Franklin Flores Silva, and we both represent the Comité Pedro Albizu Campos of New York.

It has become a political ritual for those favouring Puerto Rico's independence to come each year before this decolonization Committee, and we use the word "ritual" because each year we come here to say the same thing: that Puerto Rico is a colony of the United States and to ask you to maintain the colonial case on your agenda so that the General Assembly may confront the colonial Power.

Each year as well we feel frustration when we leave the confines of this building because, while it is true that this Committee adopts a resolution recognizing the need to abolish colonialism in Puerto Rico, at the moment of truth, which is that of putting the case before the General Assembly, we suddenly find obstacles, political manoeuvres and under-the-table arrangements which prevent demanding that the United States should implement a decolonization process in our country.

(Mr. Torres Santiago)

Moreover, it seems incredible that once again most members of the decolonization Committee are not living up to the name "decolonization" and are, year after year, taking the easiest way out by abstaining, thereby evading their historic responsibility with regard to a country which has been the victim of economic plunder and colonial exploitation for almost five centuries.

We are referring in particular to the countries which abstained in 1989: Côte d'Ivoire, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Mali, Sierra Leone, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Venezuela and Yugoslavia. Of this list, the unfortunate abstention of Venezuela hurt us very deeply because Venezuela, for political reasons, broke the ranks of Latin American solidarity by abstaining and denied Puerto Rico the right to live under the libertarian principles of the Liberator Simon Bolivar. Some countries have forgotten what Bolivar said in 1825 when he spoke of the role that the United States imperialists were beginning to play at that time, and this is something we wish to cite here, so that they may remember this when the time for voting comes. The Liberator said:

"The United States seems to have been placed in the New World by fate to cause harm to the Americas in the name of freedom."

Nor can we disregard the systematic behaviour of the People's Republic of China. The way in which it acts in the Committee on decolonization has been not only accommodating but escapist. It has neither abstained nor cast a negative vote. It has done the worst: it has not participated, nor has it been present during the discussions on the case of Puerto Rico. It is painful to see that the representatives of a people who suffered under feudal and capitalistic oppression run away when it is time to demand justice for Puerto Rico from the United States. We are not making any demands on them. We wish only to recall that they have turned their backs on the principle of solidarity established by the founder of the People's Republic of China, Mal Zedong, who said:

(Mr. Torres Santiago)

"We peoples that have won the victory in our revolution must help those who are still struggling for independence. This is our internationalist duty." It is obvious that the "internationalist duty" owed by the Chinese delegation in this Committee to the left amounts to zero and that the principle of Chinese solidarity went to the grave with Chairman Mao.

The CHAIRMAN: I may be compelled to stop the petitioner unless he refrains from making references to a member country, a member of this Committee and a sovereign State. I cannot accept that kind of reference.

Mr. TORRES SANTIAGO (interpretation from Spanish): I ask you to allow me to exercise the right to free expression. May I continue, Mr. Chairman?

The CHAIRMAN: You have that right only so long as it does not infringe the right of others, so you cannot in this Committee make undue negative references to a member country and a member of the Committee, no.

Mr. TORRES SANTIAGO (interpretation from Spanish): I was not making negative references; I was making reference to negative actions. May I continue, Mr. Chairman?

The CHAIRMAN: No, if that is the manner in which you are going to continue, I may be compelled to stop you, unless I get the concurrence of the Committee members to allow you to continue in this manner.

Mr. TORRES SANTIAGO (interpretation from Spanish): I cannot determine whether my statement will be what you might consider offensive to members of the Committee.

My understanding is that my statement should be heard, on the basis of the right to free expression.

The CHAIRMAN: Mr. Torres Santiago, the Committee has a mandate to accomplish, and the purpose of having petitioners coming here is to furnish the Committee with the kind of information that will help it consider the items on its agenda and help the process of decolonization of the Territories on its list.

By referring to member countries in such a manner, you are neither complying with the traditions of the Committee, in accordance with the courtesy accorded to you as a petitioner, nor serving the decolonization process in general or the issue under consideration in particular.

Mr. TORRES SANTIAGO (interpretation from Spanish): I understand that my statement includes criticisms, and it includes criticisms because this Committee is also a part of the problem of Puerto Rico, since it is a Committee on decolonization.

I should like, if you will allow me, to continue reading my statement. I cannot tell in advance whether what it contains will injure what you consider the sensitivities of members of the Committee.

The CHAIRMAN: In that case, the Chair is ready to grant you permission to continue, but if the Chair feels that your words are unacceptable to the Committee, the Chair may be compelled to stop you again, unless the Committee decides otherwise, in which case I might defer granting you permission to speak until a later time, when the Committee will take action on it.

Mr. TORRES SANTIAGO (interpretation from Spanish): Mention has been made of the fact that part of my statement is indeed critical, not only of those who abstained but also of those who cast negative votes. If you feel that that is offensive, I do not see what that damage or offence consists in, because I think that the Committee should be open to criticism, and I assume that that includes self-criticism.

The CHAIRMAN: Mr. Torres Santiago, I do not think we should waste in this way the time of the Committee, which should be put to better use, for the very noble purpose intended. I believe I have made myself clear. With that understanding, you may proceed, but should the Chair feel that you are out of line with the traditions and norms of the Committee, the Chair might be compelled to stop you again.

Mr. TORRES SANTIAGO (interpretation from Spanish): I shall omit the parts which contain criticism and shall simply read the end of my statement; I trust that this time I shall be granted the right to freedom of expression. May I continue, Sir?

I know that some will say that we Puerto Ricans have not developed an anti-colonial struggle with weapons in hand, that there have been no anti-colonial wars in Puerto Rico, such as those of the Algerians and the Vietnamese. But that is an evasive judgement, because although it is true that our experience has not been like those of the peoples I have mentioned, Puerto Rico has, on the other hand, been the only country on Earth which has resisted and has maintained its nationhood through a war of the spirit and through moral resistance, since we did not possess the weapons and the training needed to liberate ourselves from colonialism, having been denied them by the free countries of the world. But this does not mean that armed struggle has been absent from our liberation process. There have been rebellions since the times of Indian and black slavery, when we faced the Spanish empire. And when the imperialistic supremacy of the United States reached its zenith during the 1950s, when it was the only country in the world to possess atomic weapons and did as it wished with the lives of peoples, it was Puerto Rican nationalists who came to the centres of power of the United States, to Blair House and the Congress, to remind the United States that while Puerto Ricans did not have the weapons to sink its naval forces, we had weapons to

(Mr. Torres Santiago)

sink its prestige in the world, and that task was carried out by Griselio Torresola, Oscar Collazo, Lolita Lebron, Andres Figueroa Cordero, Irving Flores and Rafael Cancel Miranda, who, wielding the weapon of dignity, shame and honour, turned into reality the words of Albizu Campos: "To take our country from us, first they must take our lives."

(Mr. Torres Santiago)

From then on, nothing could stop them. They faced hunger and poverty. They faced traitors and renegades. They faced pain and death. But from all the pain and tragedy of the liberation struggle they emerged untainted; they knew that the dignity of their country was worth far more than Caesar's 30 pieces of silver.

We do not ask you to display the supreme heroism of those Puerto Rican nationalists. But we ask this Committee to shoulder the responsibility of taking the colonial case of Puerto Rico to the General Assembly, so that once and for all - without subterfuge, without compromises, without pressure, without blackmail, without bribery - the Assembly may demand of the United States the independence of Puerto Rico.

Mr. Torres Santiago withdrew.

Mr. LU Yongshou (China) (interpretation from Chinese): Mr. Chairman, my delegation thanks you for interrupting the previous speaker, whose statement unjustly attacked China. The Chinese delegation rejects his accusations. (spoke in English)

I hope that that person will behave himself in future.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Lydia Ponce Moran (Puertorriqueños Pro-Estadidad, Vega Baja) took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN: I call on Ms. Ponce Moran.

Ms. PONCE MORAN (interpretation from Spanish): My name is Lydia Ponce, and I am Chairman of the Vega Baja local council of Puertorriqueños Pro-Estadidad. I am accompanied by Mrs. Felicita Flores of the Ceiba local council.

I am here to lay out the basic thinking behind our demand for the political right to be represented within the United States as a sovereign state of the Union.

I argue that Puerto Rico should be accepted and viewed within the Union, with due regard for the basic elements of its culture. I refer specifically to giving

(Ms. Ponce Moran)

its Spanish language equal dignity to that of the nation's English language. I feel fully secure in the conviction that I am an integral part of America, a vast human mosaic made up of highly diverse individuals, customs and cultural traditions. But, like a jigsaw puzzle whose pieces are different but fit into one another, those of us who make up that mosaic have a unity of heart and a unity of feelings about being Americans. I am fully convinced that our country, with its homogeneous and united Hispanic culture, can, as a Hispanic sovereign State, not only preserve its cultural heritage but make it even stronger. We urge that the cultural elements of Puerto Rican culture should be viewed as enriching United States culture. This is a historical and cultural process resulting from our relations with the United States which has an Anglo-Saxon heritage. Our coexistence has given us habits and tastes that would ensure that as a Hispanic State, Puerto Rico would become the cultural tourist centre of the United States.

When Puerto Rico as a Hispanic State becomes a tourist capital through this historical process, the historic and cultural elements will be strengthened in an effort to show our fellow citizens the nature of the great Hispanic cultural tradition of our people. The ability to esteem others is a part of the American nation, based on respect for minorities and existing in the context of the Constitution's guarantees of civil rights. It is within that historical context of nationhood that another sovereign State advances with its own features, its own face, already united by decades of persistent joint endeavours. Ultimately, in gaining all the rights inherent in a democracy, our people also calls for the protection of its cultural values.

To support this thesis of cultural enhancement, I would note something which we islanders observe when we visit Puerto Rican communities in the United States. We are often surprised by the dedication with which Puerto Rican cultural and religious activities are carried on by citizens who are already integrated into

(Ms. Ponce Moran)

United States society, with all the relevant rights and prerogatives, but who have preserved and strengthened characteristics of our Puerto Rican culture.

At the same time, it is undeniable that Hispanic culture has been enriched by United States culture, many of whose elements are now part of our daily activities. For example, the religious element of Protestantism has had an impact on a basically Catholic people; United States holidays such as Thanksgiving Day are celebrated with the same enthusiasm as they are in the United States.

This element is further strengthened when Puerto Ricans emigrating to the North are not poor people in search of work, as in earlier decades, but substantial numbers of the most talented members of our society: our professionals. There are many thousands of nurses, social workers, teachers, doctors, engineers and others, trained in the fine universities of our country, who travel northward in search of better salaries. Many States of the Union turn to Puerto Rico to recruit our most talented people.

For that reason, I wish to refer to our natural mother tongue: Spanish. Owing to Puerto Rico's position as an island in the Caribbean archipelago, Spanish is of prime importance as a link and a primary means of communication in the social, cultural, political and commercial fields between North, Central and South America and Europe. It is fallacious and deceitful for those who oppose statehood to claim that if we were to become a State of the United States, we would lose Spanish in Puerto Rico because English would be imposed as an official language.

Political pressure by the United Nations on countries with colonial or colonialist vestiges - especially the increasingly powerful voice of the third world - has already become irresistible, and therefore, as a Puerto Rican, I realize that there will be understanding, approval and support for Puerto Rico as a federal State.

(Ms. Ponce Moran)

This is not a time to consider how much it would cost in dollars and cents to fulfil our national destiny but rather how much we would have to pay in terms of uncertainty, spiritual poverty, respect and consideration in the eyes of the international community if at this time we did not once and for all resolve the political grievances of our colony.

Five hundred years after the discovery, we have grown. The New World has been changed. But some things have been preserved almost in their original form, and indeed improved, and one of them is the Spanish language. So we ask ourselves - and we shall answer ourselves - how it is possible that the Spanish language, the second-ranking language of the world, should be an obstacle to the granting of statehood to the island. Whatever solution is adopted, it will not be easy for anyone. Any decision will mean advantages for some and sacrifices for others. We will all have to risk some things to gain others.

Any change that takes place, especially in the direction of sovereign statehood for the island, will have to be based on the following realistic foundations. First, a people cannot be compelled to abandon its language, its culture, its unique characteristics; rather, it must be helped, so that, increasingly united, it will continue developing harmoniously, creatively and effectively. Secondly, a realistic time lapse must be allowed to bring about the necessary adjustments economically, socially and culturally, though we are already well advanced in this respect. Thirdly, Puerto Rico will have to show the greatest interest in ensuring that its public and private educational system establishes the teaching of Spanish and English as official, functional languages and the principal instruments of communication and healthy coexistence. Fourthly, the preservation and strengthening of both languages in Puerto Rican society will in turn serve as an element of unity between Northern Caribbean and South American cultures. Fifthly, no people can now or in future survive unless it becomes a member of what

(Ms. Ponce Moran)

might be termed universal society, which enriches, strengthens and preserves its particular values.

We endorse statehood because we deserve to be integrated into our American nation. All that is required is that it be granted to us and that you help us to achieve the political rights of equal representation and participation, with all the rights and duties that that entails.

May God help us to achieve this.

Ms. Ponce Moran withdrew.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

The CHAIRMAN: We shall continue hearing petitioners this afternoon. Time permitting, we may begin our consideration of pending items and hold further consultations.

I wish to draw members' attention to aide-memoire 30/90, containing a communication received from the office of the Governor of the United States Virgin Islands, which has been circulated to members.

Before adjourning this meeting, I wish to remind members that, according to the programme of work adopted by it, the Committee was to have finished its work today. The Chairman has been approached by a number of delegations requesting that the session be extended until tomorrow afternoon, it being understood that every effort will be made to expedite consultations on the pending matters so that the Committee can conclude its work by tomorrow afternoon.

As members are aware, there are still a number of outstanding issues on which the Committee will need to take action. Draft decisions on specialized agencies, foreign economic interests, military activities and the thirtieth anniversary have as yet not been tabled.

It is my understanding that consultations are still in progress with a view to reaching consensus decisions thereon. In this connection, clarification provided

(The Chairman)

by the Secretariat indicates that unless those decisions are submitted by this afternoon for circulation tomorrow morning - and provided members are agreeable to waiving the 24-hour rule - the Committee would not be in a position to take action on those decisions at its meeting tomorrow afternoon. I would therefore once again appeal to members to redouble their efforts to reach agreement on the drafts before them by this afternoon.

I understand from the Secretariat that if an agreement on those drafts is reached too late this afternoon their processing, including their translation into all languages, might be very difficult to complete by tomorrow morning in view of the length of those documents. Furthermore, should the Security Council meet between now and tomorrow the Department of Conference Services would not be in a position to give priority to the Committee's documentation.

Besides those decisions, the other items on which the Special Committee has yet to take action are the item relating to Puerto Rico, the draft resolution submitted by Norway, the question of Gibraltar, the question of Western Sahara, including the hearing of a petitioner, the report of the Working Group, and the reports of the two seminars organized by the Committee in Vanuatu and Barbados in observance of the thirtieth anniversary of the Declaration.

As members can see from the foregoing, unless the Chairman receives the full co-operation of all members the Committee will not be in a position to conclude its session even by tomorrow afternoon. Hence I once again call for continued efforts by members and their usual co-operation in expediting our work.

Mrs. BERMUDEZ (Cuba) (interpretation from Spanish): Mr. Chairman, in the light of the information you have just given us on the work that lies ahead and the pending informal consultations, I should like to propose that we continue the informal consultations following this afternoon's meeting. If we are able to make progress, some documents could be ready by tomorrow.

Mr. SHAHEED (Syrian Arab Republic) (interpretation from Arabic): We have no objection to having consultations after the afternoon meeting. However, I think the representative of Czechoslovakia is not now present, and his delegation has introduced many amendments to draft resolutions on the specialized agencies and military activities, so I fear we will not be able to make progress.

The CHAIRMAN: I note the proposal that we have consultations this afternoon, time and the situation permitting. The representative of Czechoslovakia will hopefully be in our midst at this afternoon's meeting, in which case I shall seek his participation in the consultations, which would meet the concern expressed by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

If the items on our agenda allow us enough time to engage in further consultations, then we can proceed as the repesentative of Cuba has suggested.

Mr. ACOSTA (Venezuela) (interpretation from Spanish): At this stage, my delegation has listened carefully to the statements made by various representatives and by members of the Bureau. Accordingly, my delegation would like to request the Bureau and members of the Committee to consider the idea that this afternoon, immediately after exhausting the list of petitioners, we should have the formal presentation of the draft resolution that my delegation sponsored on the item. We would next hear the representatives who traditionally speak and would proceed to take action on the item this afternoon. Then, if time allows, or after this meeting, we would continue informal consultations to deal with the remaining draft resolutions.

I make this statement in public after several consultations we have had among members of the Committee on the basis of information supplied by the Secretariat. We would be grateful if our idea were favourably considered.

Mrs. KING-ROUSSEAU (Trinidad and Tobago): In view of the statement which you, Sir, have just made and with which my delegation fully agrees, we wish to express the hope that draft resolution A/AC.109/L.1745 will not be considered before Thursday afternoon in order to allow the ongoing consultations to continue and, in accordance with the normal practice of the Committee, not to force consideration of a text when consultations are being undertaken.

The CHAIRMAN: As to the first remark made by the representative of Venezuela, the course of action that the Chair also intended to take was that we should exhaust the item on the agenda for today and then proceed with pending matters during the time remaining to us.

The representative of Trinidad and Tobago has proposed that the proposal by the representative of Norway should be considered on Thursday afternoon, so that members will have more time for further consultation.

(The Chairman)

May I take it that members agree to that course of action, including the waiver of the 24-hour requirement indicated, should that be necessary?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 1.25 p.m.